

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SIL-01 LAB-04 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 /066 W  
-----128499 062114Z /66

R 062028Z MAR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5313  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
SECDEF WASHDC  
USMISSION USNATO  
USNMR SHAPE  
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, MILI, BE  
SUBJECT: BELGIAN MILITARY DEMONSTRATION, MARCH 4

REF: BRUSSELS 1402

SUMMARY. AN ESTIMATED 20,000 MILITARY, THEIR DEPENDENTS  
AND SUPPORTERS, HELD A PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION IN  
BRUSSELS ON SATURDAY MARCH 4, TO CALL ATTENTION  
TO MILITARY DEMANDS FOR HIGHER SALARIES. MINISTER OF  
DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS' MANAGEMENT OF DEFENSE  
MINISTRY SPENDING IS SHARPLY CRITICIZED. END SUMMARY.

1. MILITARY TRADE UNION ACTIVITY IN BELGIUM DATES  
BACK TO THE END OF THE 1960S, WHEN FRATERNAL MILITARY  
ORGANIZATIONS, DATING FROM WORLD WAR I, BEGAN TO LOSE  
MEMBERSHIP TO TRADE UNIONS. A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO  
THE SHIFT WAS A GOVERNMENT DECISION IN 1972 TO INCREASE  
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MILITARY SALARIES, BUT ALSO TO ABOLISH THE "SPECIALI-  
ZATION PREMIUM" PAID TO MILITARY TECHNICIANS. AFTER  
A PERIOD OF QUASI-ILLEGAL UNION ACTIVITY IN THE  
MILITARY, SUCH ACTIVITY IN THE MILITARY (BUT NOT THE  
GENDARMERIE), BECAME LEGAL (ON THE CONDITIONS THAT  
THERE BE NO STRIKES AND THAT DEMONSTRATORS WEAR  
MUFTI). POSSIBLY UP TO 80 PERCENT OF THE BELGIAN

MILITARY NOW BELONG TO A UNION. A COMPLICATING AND DELAYING FACTOR IN THE LEGALIZATION OF MILITARY TRADE UNION ACTIVITY WAS THAT ALL UNIONS IN BELGIUM ARE AFFILIATED WITH ONE OF THE THREE PRINCIPAL POLITICAL PARTIES. ALL THREE PARTY-AFFILIATED TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS ARE NOW ACTIVE IN THE MILITARY AND IN COMPETITION FOR MEMBERS.

2. IN 1972, THE GOVERNMENT GRANTED MILITARY PERSONNEL INCREASED SALARIES LINKED TO INCREASES FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE. FROM THAT TIME A DISCREPANCY AROSE BETWEEN THE SALARIES PAID TO THE GENDARMERIE AND THOSE PAID TO THE MILITARY WITH THE GENDARMERIE, WHEN ACTING AS OFFICERS OF THE JUDICIAL POLICE, RECEIVING HIGHER SALARIES THAN THEIR MILITARY CDUNTERPARTS. SINCE THE 1972 SETTLEMENT, MILITARY UNIONS HAVE PRESSED FOR EQUALIZATION BETWEEN GENDARMERIE AND MILITARY SALARIES, AND JURISDICTIONAL COMPETITION BETWEEN THE MILITARY UNIONS HAS INCREASED.

3. DESPITE VANDEN BOEYNANTS' CLAIM (PARA 1-6, BRUSSELS 2416) THAT HE HAS DONE HIS BEST BUT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET HIS MINISTERIAL COLLEAGUES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE AND THE BUDGET TO GO ALONG, HE IS BLAMED BY THE MILITARY FOR FAILURE TO ACHIEVE MILITARY-GENDARMERIE SALARY EQUIVALENCY. THE MILITARY UNIONS CLAIM THAT VANDEN BOEYNANTS HAS SPENT VAST SUMS ON NEW LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MILITARY EQUIPMENT, WHICH HAS NOT LEFT SUFFICIENT FUNDS IN THE DEFENSE BUDGET FOR INCREASED SALARIES. FURTHER, THE UNIONS CLAIM TO HAVE FOUND OUT EARLY IN 1978 THAT, DESPITE HIS ASSERTIONS THAT HE HAD, VANDEN BOEYNANTS HAD NOT PLEADED THE CASE FOR INCREASED MILITARY SALARIES WITH HIS MINISTERIAL COLLEAGUES.

4. THE RESULT OF THE INCREASING UNHAPPINESS ON THE PART OF THE MILITARY OVER THE SALARY ISSUE HAS BEEN DIRECTED BY MILITARY UNION LEADERS INTO INCREASING PUBLIC PROTESTS. THE FIRST LARGE SCALE DEMONSTRATION WAS HELD IN LIEGE, JANUARY 21 (REFTEL), THE MOST RECENT MARCH 4 IN BRUSSELS.

5. THE PRINCIPAL ISSUE IN THE BRUSSELS DEMONSTRATION WAS THE DEMAND BY THE MILITARY THAT THEIR SALARIES BE RAISED TO EQUAL THOSE OF THE GENDARMERIE. SLOGANS CARRIED ON BANNERS INCLUDED SUCH PHRASES AS: "MOSCOW LAUGHS AND NATO BLUSHES," "WE WANT TO FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS," "VDB, YOUR SLAVES ARE HUNGRY", "VDB, RESIGN," "BELGIUM, THE CANCER OF NATO," "PARLIAMENTARY TRAVEL ON OUR MONEY," "PRAVDA, ITS TRUE, VDB IS A LIAR," AND "VANDEN BOEYNANTS CANNOT CON-

TINUE TO TRICK US AND TO REFUSE TO LISTEN TO US." PARTI-  
CIPATION WAS VARIOUSLY ESTIMATED AT BETWEEN 5,500 (GENDAR-  
MERIE ESTIMATE) AND 30,000 (LOCAL POLICE ESTIMATE).  
EMBASSY OBSERVERS ESTIMATED ABOUT 20,000, BUT THIS FIGURE  
INCLUDES FAMILIES, AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF NON-MILITARY SUP-  
PORTERS AND GROUPS TRYING TO MAKE CAPITAL OUT OF THE  
DEMONSTRATION FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES.  
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6. COMMENT: REGARDLESS OF THE EXACT NUMBER OF MILITARY  
PARTICIPANTS, THE NUMBERS WERE IMPRESSIVE. IT SHOULD

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BE REMEMBERED THAT THE ENTIRE BELGIAN MILITARY  
ESTABLISHMENT NUMBERS ABOUT 88,000, 65,000 OF WHOM  
ARE CAREER MILITARY, THE REST DRAFTEES. OF THE  
CAREER MILITARY OVER HALF ARE BASED IN GERMANY. THE  
GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE WILL HAVE TO DO SOMETHING TO ADDRESS  
THE EXISTING MALAISE, AND WHILE IT CAN ADMINISTRATIVELY  
HANDLE CERTAIN ANOMALIES, THE COST OF THE TOTAL UNION  
DEMANDS HAS BEEN ESTIMATED AT BETWEEN 3 AND 4 BILLION  
BF ANNUALLY. THE GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO HAVE TO CONSIDER  
CAREFULLY ANY SETTLEMENT OF THE MILITARY DEMANDS AS A  
PRECEDENT FOR OTHER DEMANDS. FOR INSTANCE, 50,000  
POSTAL WORKERS HAVE SET A STRIKE FOR MARCH 13,  
AND SABENA AND URBAN TRANSPORT EMPLOYEES MAY ALSO STRIKE.

FURTHERMORE, CIVIL SERVICE SALARIES HAVE BEEN FROZEN  
(EXCEPT FOR THE COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENTS). IT IS  
CLEAR THAT THE UNHAPPINESS OF THE MILITARY WITH VANDEN  
BOEYNANTS GOES FAR BEYOND PERSONAL, POLITICALLY-  
MOTIVATED ATTACKS ON HIM AND THAT ANY SETTLEMENT WILL  
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HAVE AT LEAST SOME EFFECT ON THE MANAGEMENT OF  
BELGIAN DEFENSE POLICY. THERE WAS NO CRITICISM, HOWEVER,  
OF SPECIFIC MILITARY ISSUES (E.G. HAWK) OR OF THE BASIC,  
PRO-NATO ORIENTATION OF BELGIAN DEFENSE POLICY.  
THESE ARE NOT AT ISSUE IN THE PRESENT DISPUTE. END  
COMMENT. CHAMBERS

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## Message Attributes

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